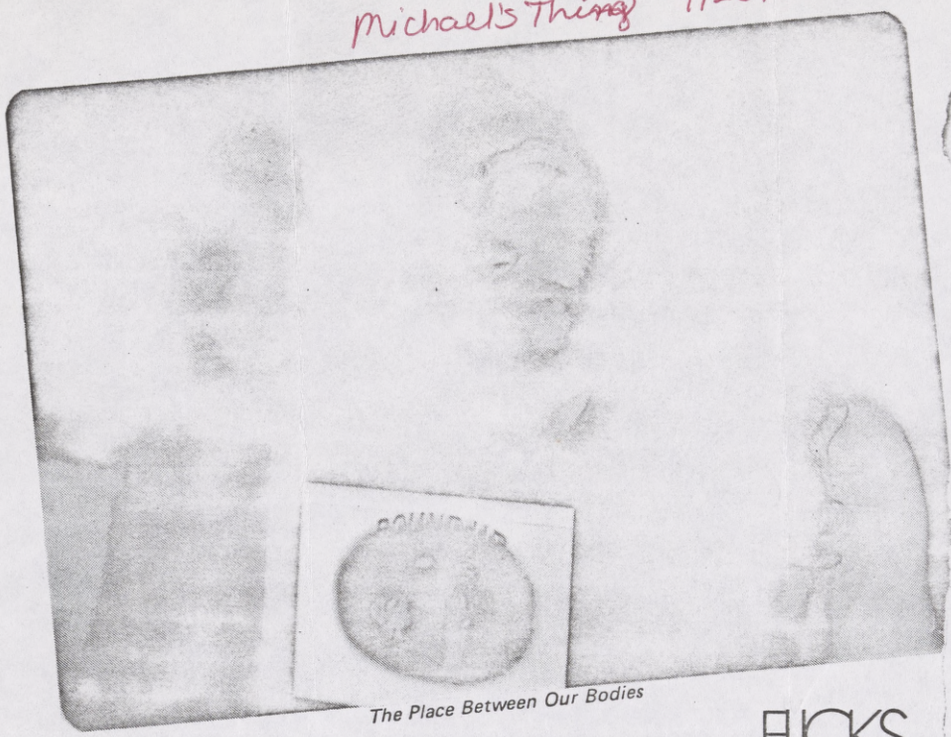
Michael's Thing 9/20/76



The Place Between Our Bodies

FLICKS

## GAY FILM FESTIVAL

"We've come a long way" should be the slogan of The Glines, a gay owned, gay run theatre located at 260 West Broadway. Adding variety to its program, the theatre opened a gay film festival with three short films by and for gay people.

The first on the bill was *The Place Between Our Bodies.* It was the most overtly sexual and the weakest of the three, a personal exploration of gay male sexuality. Sexual obsession, subjectification, and objectification were the issues explored. The film dealt with some of the obvious problems many city gay men have with impersonal relationships. It becomes difficult to relate to another gay man as a person. People become objects, sheer pawns in the mating syndrome. Their body characteristics (physique, penis size, personal appearance) become more important that the "celebration of gay male love."

Throughout the 33 minute film it seemed its author, Michael Wallin, was obsessed with sexual obsession. The film repeated its theme to a point where I wanted to shut my eyes and say "enough!" Yes, sexual obsession can be a problem and one can easily become sexually neurotic, but let's not be neurotic in our presentation of it.

The film was unimaginative and I think the author was unsure of his point. We were told before the film started that the film should not be seen as advocating monogamy, however, in reality one could read little else into it. The obsessed person in the film (presumably the author) finds a lover, and he and his lover come to terms with their earlier sexual obsession. But, is sexual obsession really a problem? Any obsession can be a problem, but obsession is not necessarily a problem for *all* people. The film examines sexual obsession of the premise that it is negative, and the audience is given little freedom to examine it in any other manner.

The other two films were somewhat less demanding and certainly much more creative. The second on the bill, Prissy Grunt's *Crypt,* by Terry Hammond, was certainly the most comical. The 20 minute film was a transvestite farce, similar to *The Rocky Horror Show* in its allusion to the Dracula theme.

Prissy Grunt visits her crackpot doctor. He surmises that she is a vampire. No stakes in the heart will cure her, the doctor diagnosis. She is a transvestite and the only cure is a dildo in the mouth.

The film is aided by an Andy Warhol type dialogue. It is at times silly and even immature, but for the most part it works.

The third in the festival was the best. It was a 60 minute film by Hajime Kondo called *The Loft Boys.* The film was basically images of lesbian and gay men involved in routines of everyday life. The soundless film had no plot and no story to tell. It was merely flashes of people being themselves. The film brings together cityscapes and countrysides, crowd scenes and portraits. Gayness weaves in and out and it becomes an integral part of one's life. Flashes of flowers, sex, flowers, sex, provide an association of continuence—the mixed metaphor of wholeness and naturalness intertwined to form images of one's complete being.

The film is an experiment we were told at its onset, and I might add, a good one. Its form and definition was something which the other films seemed to lack. The film did not deal with an issue, but rather an image of daily existence in which gayness became an integral part on one's existence.

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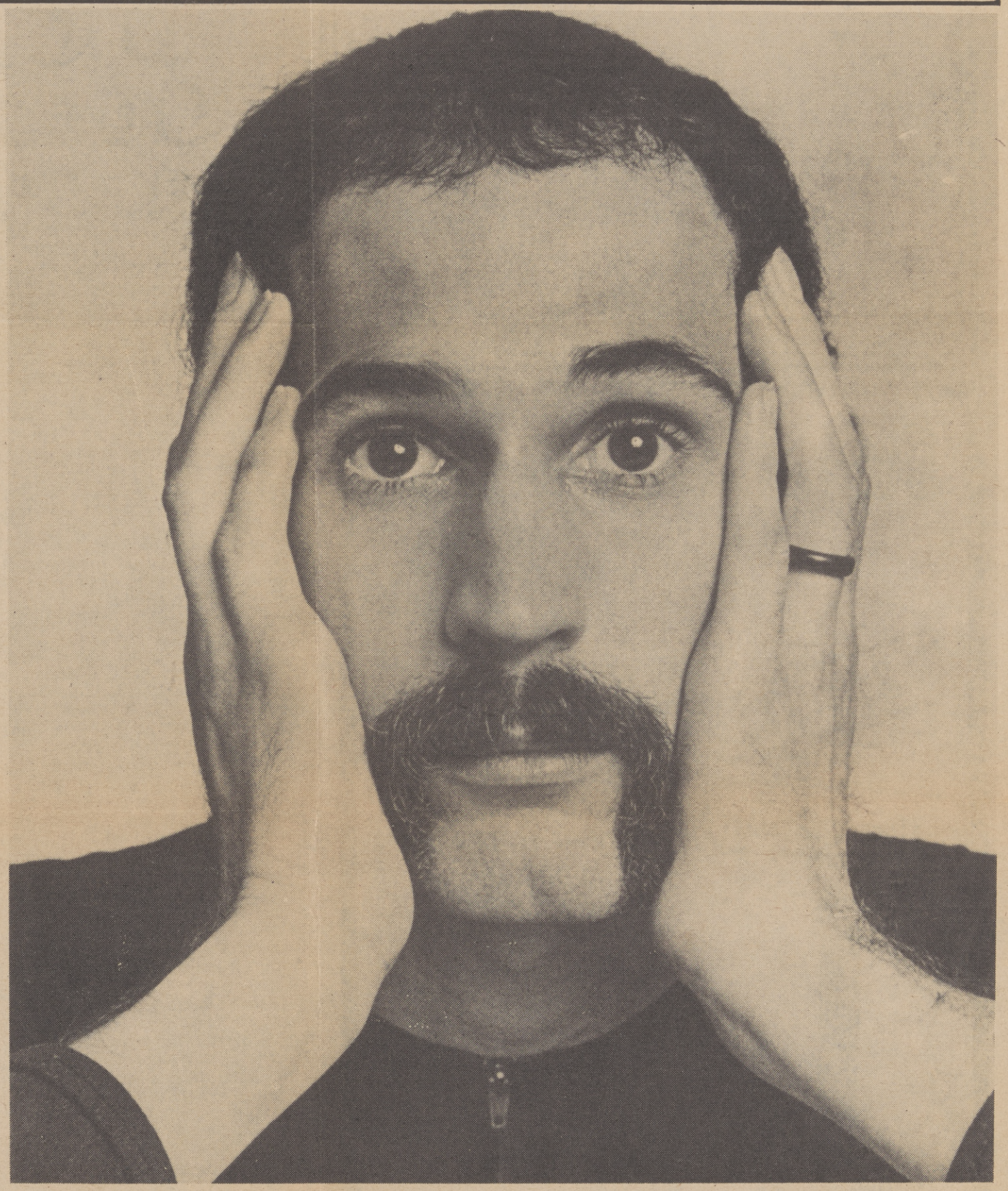
# THE GLINES: GAY THEATRE and FILMS

by Yvon Beaulieu

**In just two years, The Glines has rallied a strong support for gay arts. Yea, gay!**



*(Right) Mr. Paul Vanase is largely responsible for the success and interest at and in The Glines. Vanase's "A Drop In The Pudding" is adventurous/creative.*

In the past few months, the Glines at 250 West Broadway has presented a marvelous assortment of gay off-off Broadway entertainment for New Yorkers. It has provided the metropolitan area an excellent arena for experimental works that might very well never find exposure anywhere else. As a community center for gay arts and cultrual affairs, The Glines is to be applauded for its valiant efforts in public service and in fostering community spirit.

Now for the truth! Their particular choice this midsummer was a selection of gay films that undercut what gayness seems to be about. Just because it's gay is no excuse ever.

*The Place Between Our Bodies* is supposed to be a personal exploration of gay male sexuality that deals with sexual obsession, cruising, fantasy, masturbation and lovemaking. The promo copy informs us that it's explicit without being exploitive. Well, after 33 minutes of mere porno with amateur dubbing and heavy Stravinsky and electronic music, one is convinced that the major flaw in this homosexual film is the homosex. Oftentimes, gay film, poetry or politics doesn't know how to homosexualize things subtly or without ceaseless backslapping. To be gay does not mean we all want to be Cal Culver. One regrets to say that this film confuses, frustrates and falls flat on its face; Michael Wallin has produced a choppy amateurish rip-off with his lover, Mark.

Loosely autobiographical, the film progresses from Wallin's involvement in relatively non-emotional relationship with his hippy, very counterculture lover, Mark, whose smile surely rivals the Chesire cat. The film aims valiantly at its goal, a genuine exploration into the gay mind. However, it remains just on the surface and focuses badly and often out of sync on the sexual aspect of their lives. If P.B.O.B. was a mere porno film without pretensions, one would forgive and forget, but as it is, it thinks itself a profound statement on gay psychology and fails miserably. Self-indulgent, cheap looking and bitterly disappointing.

Then comes *Prissy Grunt's Crypt,* described as a transvestite farce, with a little dab of Dracula; it's a satirical look at people's foolishness. It features well-known cabaret performers such as John Michel, Billy Blackwell, Tiffany Cartier and Helen Morgan. Twenty minutes of film that has to be considered in the worst taste imagineable, beyond camp, beyond kitsch, beyond everything. Why must the gay community subject itself to such awful divertissement? Badly made, poorly shot, utterly without aesthetic merit and not funny at all, one must insist that just because it has transvestites in it doesn't make it entertaining or worth seeing.

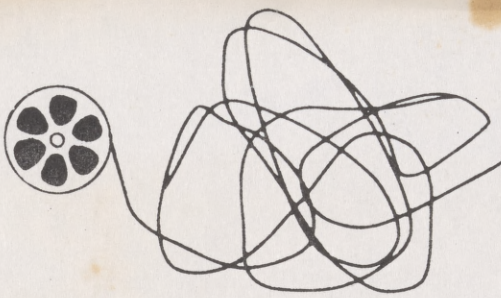
For their third selection, *The Loft Boys* by Hajime Kondo, The Glines struck gold. *The Loft Boys,* an impressionistic film that brings together beautiful cityscapes with lush countrysides, crowd scenes and individual portraits, weaves gayness comfortably and sensitively in and out of each collage-like scene as people do in their lives. Superb use of color, images and cutting rhythm produces a film of intelligence and imaginative beauty. A bit too long, *The Loft Boys* honestly explores homosexual diversities with many praiseworthy subtleties, intelligently conceived and poetically realized. Of the three films, *The Loft Boys* was the only film of merit and well-worth seeing, though it badly needs cutting.

Gay experimental filmmakers, like most amateurs, selfishly indulge their ignorance of the medium, their lack of technical expertise. Defensive about themselves, they often exaggerate their own techniques, trying to convince their audiences that their tentative, exploratory beginnings should be accepted as definitive artistry, fully matured. Granted that these eager naive beginners often have no money with which to create sophisticated films and often seek alternatives to the Hollywood approach. However, these filmmakers must be subject to the same critical exigencies that straight filmmakers must submit to. Gays deserve professional treatment, that honestly, intelligently and beautifully films their fantasies, their lives.

*A Drop in the Pudding,* a two-act theatrical morality play of eternal truths by Paul Vanase, was recently presented at the Glines, New York's Gay Arts Center. Directed by Richard Roberts with choreography by Larry Sauer, the play combined drama with choral odes and dance as it followed the experiences of a young man searching through his life for the perfect lover.

Vanase is no newcomer to the theatre. *Pudding* is, he says, the natural successor to *Wonderful Woman,* his sci-fi musical which explored the possibilities of a world without love. It is his second original play to be presented Off Off Broadway in less than a year. An actor as well as playwright, his credits include *Glamour, Glory and Gold, Saturday Night at the Baths* and *Mass Murder in the Balcony of the Old Ritz Rialto.* Vanase is slated to make his Broadway debut this fall in the disco-musical *Aliss at the Palace.*

**continued to page 27**



P.G. Springer
Box 2505 - Station A
Champaign, Ill. 61820

October 7, 1976

Michael Wallin
55 Ford Street
San Francisco, Calif. 94114

Dear Michael Wallin:

A glossy national magazine for gays has requested from me a review of THE PLACE BETWEEN OUR BODIES. Ron Epple, my neighbor and collegue, has shown me a print several times, and my review is being mailed today.

I expect that the review would be enhanced by certain stills from the film, and wonder if you could supply me with some? I am telling the magazine to hold off publication until I hear from you. Rental information will be included in the article.

I saw SLEEPWALK at Ann Arbor this year and was instrumental in the decision to show it in Ron's Ann Arbor show here at the U. of Illinois. I hope we can arrange to see your other films sometime.

If you want to call, reach me at Ron's (217) 352-7353. Thank you.

Cordially,

P. Gregory Springer

P. Gregory Springer

Michael - Thank you for the post card. sorry I haven't been in touch sooner. I'm trying with the review, but am having some difficulties in slotting it. Mandate and Playguy wanted the piece, but have a round-about method of telling one that they won't pay, so I rejected them (a change of affairs). I just wrote something for Advocate, and have inquired to them about PLACE BETWEEN OUR BODIES, but haven't heard. And I'd sure like to do it for After Dark, but the pix are too graphic. They have a covert mag, but I'd try to do it for them IF I had other pix. Nude, yes. Touching, no. In the meantime, I hope I can continue to hold on to the photos I do have, and I'll do what I can. I think Ron is sending back the film. That's his department and I've certainly seen it enough to know it. Maybe the article should be more angled toward the artist rather than the single film? If so, I'll contact you about further discussion. P. G.

P. GREGORY SPRINGER
P. O. 2505 STATION "A"
CHAMPAIGN, ILL. 61820

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12 JAN
1977

Michael Wallin
55 Ford Street
San Francisco, Calif.
94114

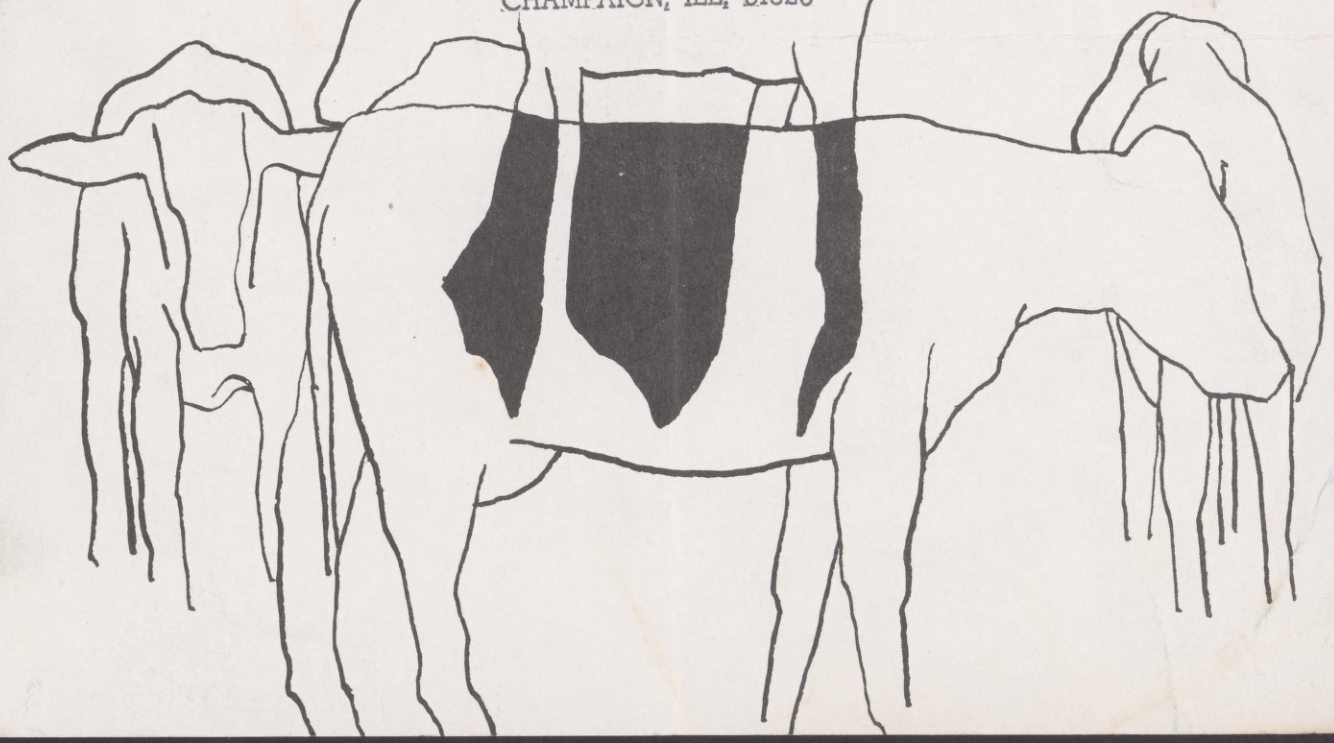
March 23, 1977

Dear Michael:

# Wit

It is possible that a mention and photos of the place between our bodies will show up soon in an Advocat article. I may incorporate the photos into something else later as well. I hav not forgotten you, but sometimes these things take time. If you need the pictures in the meantime, please let me know. Hope things are well with you. Regards.

P. GREGORY SPRINGER
P. O. 2505 STATION "A"
CHAMPAIGN, ILL. 61820



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June 21, 1977

P. GREGORY SPRINGER
P. O. 2505 STATION "A"
CHAMPAIGN, ILL. 61820

Michael Wallin
55 Ford Street
San Francisco, California
94114

Dear Michael:

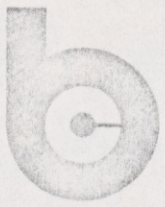
PLACE BETWEEN OUR BODIES finally made print for me, even though just with an honorable mention. The Advocate Issue 218 ran my article on Gay Avant-Garde Film and included comments on your film as well as one of the pictures. I'm trying to get a copy xeroxed and off to you, but can't do it this morning. I am still half asleep and soon must go to chicago.

Anyway, thanks for letting me take so long. I've returned all of the pictures and negatives of yours that I still have. The Advocate hasn't returned the rest of them yet, and they can be really slow at times.

Take care. Hope things are well with you. Ron says hello

Yours,
Greg Springer
P. Gregory Springer

**Baruch College**
The City University of New York
17 Lexington Avenue
New York
N.Y. 10010



**Department of Psychology**

June 16, 1977

Mr. Gregory Springer
c/o The Advocate
1730 Aimphlett Street
Suite 225
San Mateo, California

Dear Mr. Springer:

In your movie review of the June 22nd edition you alluded to two films which I might like to show to my advanced classes. Please inform me where they might be obtained for rental.

The two films in question are:

1. The Place Between Our Bodies. (Wallin)
2. Rainbows Children. (Williams)

Your reply to this letter will be very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

John Bauer

John Bauer, Ph.D.
Professor in Psychology

JB:ms

# Roots of the Gay Film

**by P. Gregory Springer**

Avant-garde films are an undefinable lot, the acceptable boundaries of which dip into such features as Scorcese's **Mean Streets** or Antonioni's **Red Desert**, and also into such snippets as a four-minute Brakhage light poem or an infinitely looped Pepsi commercial. The thin line between commercial cinema and the avant garde rests on the social and personal consciousness that is incipient in a film's artistry, opposing those films that, no matter how artful, begin in the board meetings of studio stockholders. In other words, **The Boys In the Band**, although in some ways a first for motion pictures, is not avant garde, but a commercialization of previously daring work done by personal film artists.

The avant-garde film is often a little film, a personal vision that flickers away in attics or cinematheques, galleries or garages, seen by few and later lost to time or buried in the rental shelves of a film cooperative. But this anomalous cinema, which might also be called the "art film," has a pattern of homosexual historicity that is erratic and quite dissimilar to the commercial cinema's tippy-toeing toward gay presentations. There have been attempts to chronicle gay people in film, both "straight" and avant-garde (such as Parker Tyler's chattily intellectual and name-dropping **Screening the Sexes**), but a true chronological study would probably be impossible.

Homosexuality can be inferred in everything from the cigar-chewing janitor in Murneau's **The Last Laugh** to Dietrich's drag to the master/slave relationship in **The Maltese Falcon**; and there is nothing necessarily gay about the mine workers bathing each other in **Kameradschaft** or the female student-teacher love of **Maedchen In Uniform**. "The camera is erotic," said Ingmar Bergman, and we can only specify accurately the overt references to such liberated sex roles when we speak of the "gay motion picture."

In 1930, Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali made their second surrealist motion picture, **L'Age d'or**. Their first film collaboration was the anacoluthic **Un Chien Andalou**, which featured ants crawling out of hands, priests and donkeys being dragged by pianos, cross-gender dressing and severed wrists, and the famous slicing of a woman's eye. While this shattering of images and ideas caused considerable scandal, **L'Age d'or** caused even more, to the extent that Dali himself renounced it.

**L'Age d'or** ("The Golden Age") was clearly a demand for the liberation of the libido against the bourgeois fetters of morality. Rather than tease or pander to the hypocrisy of the status quo, Bunuel took 60 minutes and segmented them with a couple's quest to express their sexual desires, desires that had been blocked by laws, priests, classes, money, "normalcy." In their attraction, the couple suck the toes of marble statues, chew their fists, kick dogs, witness the random violence of the upper classes and copulate in crowds; the film culminates in a great orgy based on De Sade's **120 Days of Sodom**, but Bunuel turns the sadistic Duke of Blangis into none other than Jesus Christ. The film ends on that revelation, accompanied with a cheery bullfight song.

Needless to say, **L'Age d'or** was banned, although it was shown for a few weeks in Paris, billed as "the dream of a madman." Looking back, the importance of Bunuel's work was not the gesture of showing something the screen had never seen. It was, rather, his anti-romantic consciousness for sexual liberation. At 77, Bunuel is still making films in France, but **L'Age d'or**, although prints exist, is hopelessly entangled in legal problems and remains unavailable to the public.

At the same time in France, 1930, Jean Cocteau—the poet, dramatist, artist and filmmaker—made a paean to the beauty, poetry and mystery of man. **Blood of a Poet** was the beginning of the surreal imagery and optical trickery (accompanied by muscular, self-adoring men) that was repeatedly employed in Cocteau's works. His romantic, unideological wizardry drew him the scorn of the "true" surrealists, but the sensual handling of things male, including handsome angels, has held up over the years, retaining freshness, mystery and—Cocteau's aim—the power to astonish.

All avant-gardes are in some way political, and at the cinematic forefront was Sergei Eisenstein, the great Soviet theorist and filmmaker. Eisenstein's homosexuality was a danger to his artistic achievement under Stalin and is never visible in his films other than in the comradely relationships between members of the masses. In 1931 and 1932, Eisenstein was filming in Mexico for an opus on the people and their revolution. Freed from the scrutiny of his homeland, he shot literally miles of footage, some erotic and even pornographic, but all that remains are a few scenes of bared breasts and intimations of hammock love-making. The rest was deemed "unusable" by the film's American sponsors, and what might have been an erotic milestone, **Que Viva Mexico**, was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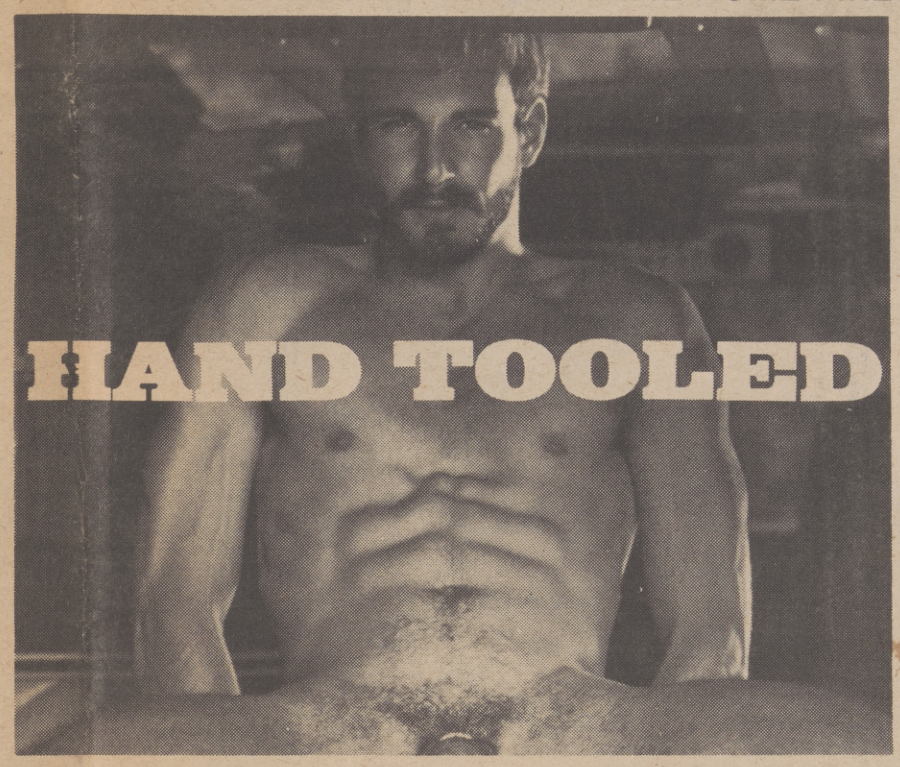


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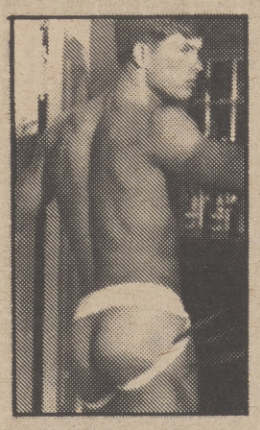

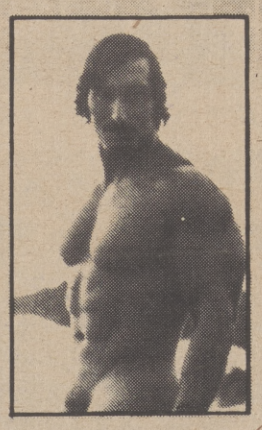

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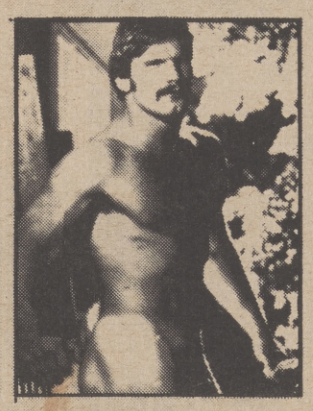

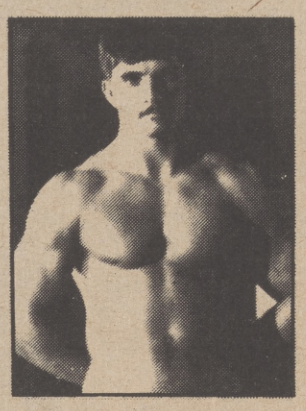

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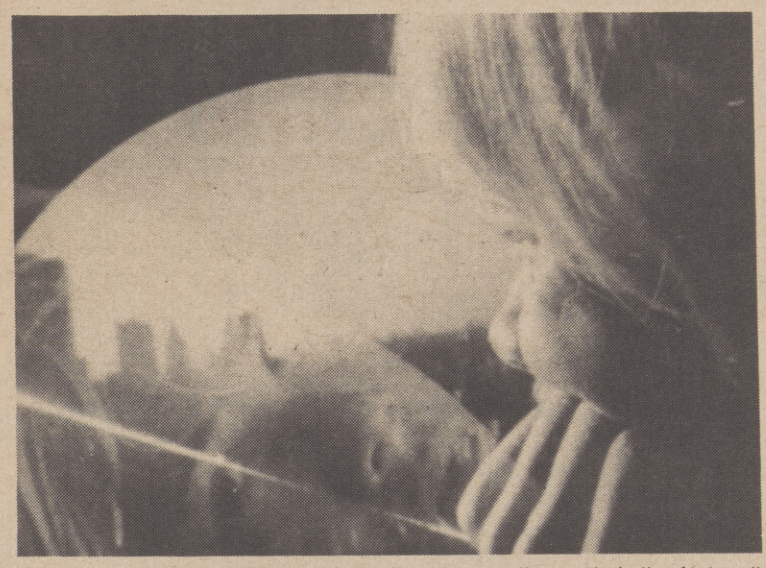
There has been no lesbian filmmaking as such until very recently, although the number of women filmmakers in the underground is higher than that in commercial cinema. With Antonin Artaud, Germaine Dulac made a surrealist film called **The Seashell and the Clergyman** (1928), about an impotent priest (it is supposed—the film is quite obtuse). It was banned in Britain, where the censors found it incomprehensible but stated that "if it does have a meaning, it is doubtlessly objectionable."

From the '40s through the '60s, Marie Menken created film studies of gardens, spermatozoa and, later, Andy Warhol, while her husband Willard Maas at that time also created some screen gems, such as **Geography of the Body** (1943), a close-up study of indistinguishable flesh parts accompanied by a narration about life on a South Seas island.

But it was Maya Deren who staked the place of women in the avant garde. Her hypnotic psychodramas of the '40s and '50s have granted her the status of "mother of the avant garde," her face gracing any study of the form. Best known of her works is **Meshes of the Afternoon** (1943), but **At Land** (1944) has the mysterious beauty of the dance, of women embracing and playing together on a secluded beach and a seaside chess scene that predates Bergman's **The Seventh Seal** by 12 years. Deren's Haitian mysticism, love for the dance, use of herself and Anais Nin as camera subjects and psychological, dream-like imagery put her at the beginning of any initiation into the symbolic underground. Her films are logically the first feminist motion pictures.

To digress some at this point, we see no overtly homosexual motion picture—that is, a film that deals primarily and openly with gay sexuality as its primary subject—in the first 50 years of the cinema. As movies grew from the first silent documents of workers or trains to a huge industry of slick narrative entertainment, other channels sprouted: animation, educational tools, training films and television. With almost as many forms as the written word, the title of a recent R.W. Fassbinder film about films (and, incidentally, homosexuality) is apt: **Beware a Holy Whore**. There is a danger in the willing servicibility of film's illusory nature. The threat of image making, warned of even by Moses, is not that it "steals souls," but that its easy acceptance creates incomplete realities, pleasurable half-truths, stereotypes. The power of the image had created a dichotomous crisis for the homosexual by 1947, whereby the lack of any screen image at all had rendered him/her an invisible person, and the possibility of Hollywood creating a non-stereotypical homosexual character was pretty unlikely. That problem still exists.

When Kenneth Anger was 17, he made the first gay movie, **Fireworks** (1947), predating commercial films by 15 years. Anger casts himself as a nervous young man who wakes in his bed surrounded by loneliness and broken



Paul from **Rainbow's Children**, Lloyd Williams' "evocative masturbation fantasy."

phallic statues. Venturing to the streets, he approaches a semi-clad sailor and subsequently suffers a brutal beating by a gang of similar, chain-bearing militia. Anger's teen-age imagination devised some graphic sadomasochistic effects, such as the spurting of blood from a finger punch to the nostrils, followed by a facial smothering of white, milky substance. Rescued by the handsome sailor and carried home, this savior is symbolically shown wearing a slow-motion Christmas tree headdress, and a sparkling explosive protrudes from his trouser-fly. The film ends with the two happily sleeping together in Anger's room, and the broken statues are restored. Simple, and today naive, but **Fireworks** is the authentic burst from the closet for films and would prepare Anger for another classic of the underground, the homo- and motoerotic **Scorpio Rising** in 1964.

Although films have been made of Jean Genet's plays, he made only one film himself, close on the heels of Anger. **Un Chant d' Amour** (1950) is not only tenderly titled, but its expression of the need human beings have for one another is one of the most beautifully realized works committed to film. Genet, himself a veteran of prisons and a lyricist of homosexual submission in them, set his love story in a prison of concrete walls. Connected only by a pinhole, two prisoners hold the walls in longing, communicate by sending streams of seminal smoke through the hole and attempt to pass flowers through the bars of their outside windows. Each of the many prisoners masturbates to his own fantasy while a sadistic guard peers on them secretly. Aroused, the guard forces a prisoner to fellate him after first forcing the man's mouth open with a pistol. While the prisoner submits, he is dreaming of a woodside embrace with the fellow prisoner who remains behind the wall. The dreams, the uninhibited and exposed masturbation, the unreaching flowers, even the guard's cautiously forceful approach, create an atmosphere of longing that is more than a metaphor for man's love. **Un Chant d'Amour** is close to a perfect poem; there is nothing frivolous about the title.

**The Place Between Our Bodies**

By the mid-'50s , the (under)-groundbreaking had been done, so to speak, and Hollywood moved in. As the Hays censorship code became tested again and again, the avant garde of sexual liberation lay nearly inert amid the sexuality of Marilyn, Brando in a **Streetcar Named Desire**, Brigitte Bardot, James Dean in **Rebel Without a Cause**, the controversial **The Moon Is Blue, Some Like It Hot, Suddenly Last Summer**, Fellini's **La Dolce Vita** (which Billy Graham called "the most immoral movie ever made" at the time), and other steps foreward. In the underground, things were quiet sexually. Gregory Markopoulos made classically based homoerotic films, but has kept most of them from being shown, and James Broughton began his quaint, poesy-like celebrations of the body notably with **Mother's Day, Four in the Afternoon, The Pleasure Garden** and so forth. Stan Brakhage made a masturbation film about himself, **Flesh of Morning.**

It was in the '60s that the doors exploded open. The "underground movie" became a household expression, if still only occasionally accessible. There were works by Bruce Conner; the homosexual interview film by Shirley Clarke, **Portrait of Jason**; the flaccid transvestitism of **Flaming Creatures**, which was repeatedly busted; Anger's **Scorpio Rising**, which rated a review in **The New Yorker**; Ken Jacobs's affectless, pre-camp sensibility in **Little Stabs at Happiness**; and of course Andy Warhol.

Warhol may have been responsible for putting the underground on the map, although he currently will not allow the distribution of any but his most recent, commercial films. His epic experiments such as **Empire** (1964) and **Sleep** (1963) were oft-cited, but most people hadn't, couldn't and

wouldn't watch them. **Blow-Job** (1964) didn't get the **Life** magazine publicity that **Empire** did, but it stands as a precursor to the conceptualists. It shows the act only from the expression on the recipient's face, but is nevertheless effective. With **Flesh** (1968) and **Lonesome Cowboys** (1969), Warhol entered feature-filmmaking and revitalized the field. His stars Taylor Mead ("the Stepin Fetchit of urban faggots"), the blase Viva, beefcake Joe Dallasandro and the rest of the troupe either overacted or didn't act at all while Warhol's inert camera casually recorded it. Warhol's films were one of the reasons the underground film came to be associated with wild, orgiastic, ungenderable sex.

Jonas Mekas, avant-garde critic and filmmaker, even accused the underground of being under the influence of a homosexual conspiracy, but was badgered into retracting the view. The '60s created Camp, and its followers persist. One of them, John Waters, the director of **Pink Flamingos**, said, "Warhol proved to us that we can show anything."

On that note, at that moment in uncensorable time and space, the underground began to redesign itself. The avant garde of the '70s is academic, structural, formal and minimal. The tendency of current art films is orderly; not sterile, certainly, but not sexy; intellectual above erotic. Today, only a few personal filmmakers are still primarily studying the sexual.

Both Bunuel and Warhol (the most noteworthy bookends for this sketchy chronology) went "commercial." For both, it was a nominal move in the sense that neither sacrificed his artistic vision. The line is blurred, again, in the categories of films of integrity.

If in the late '70s, the avant garde has relatively little to say about sexuality, commercial films have again taken the subject in hand. Universally, films come to mind that deal with mature, explicit sexuality: Hungary's Dusan Makavajev's **WR** and **Sweet Movie; In the Realm of the Senses** from Japan; Italian Pasolini's last films; Germany's films from R.W. Fassbinder; even Wertmuller's controversial role confusion in **Swept Away**. What has been done recently in the underground is mostly in the manner of documentation. A lesbian film, **Dyketactics**, comes to us from Berkeley. Barbara Kinkevich, Curt McDowell and George Kuchar continue to expand the entertainment possibilities of ambisexual camp. An explicit self-document from Michael Wallin, **The Place Between Our Bodies**, is an honest and indulgent description of two lifestyles: cruising and living with a lover. Lloyd Williams has recently created an evocative masturbation fantasy, **Rainbow's Children**, that puts **Portnoy's Complaint** to shame.

Indeed, Hollywood now seems more anxious than ever to portray or betray gayness on the screen, with **The Ritz, Norman, Is That You?, Ode to Billy Joe** and others passed by, and **The Front Runner** being sporadically promised. At Ann Arbor's 15th film festival this year, on the other hand, the homoerotic was only fleetingly glimpsed. An explicit lesbian lovemaking scene in the first-prize-winning film, **11x14** by James Benning, seemed to typify the current avant-garde attitude: the multi-faceted physical side of love is, as in life, a natural part of our films, but it is no longer the crux of the avant-garde polemic. •

# Cracking Thundercrack!

**by Joseph Michaels**

Thomas Brothers Film Studio recently had a special screening of their underground epic, **Thundercrack!**, making a point of sending invitations to the gay press. Originally conceived as a hard-core quickie to finance documentary projects, **Thundercrack!** evolved into a black-and-white, feature-length film (Thomas Brothers' first) running between two and two-and-a-half hours, depending on which version you get to see. Although first shown at the 1976 Los Angeles International Film Exposition, the film apparently is still being edited.

Background material distributed at the studio went so far as to call **Thundercrack!** "a homosexual **Gone With the Wind**" and "the first feature-length, explicitly sexual gay movie that also appeals to the mind." In the version I saw, **Thundercrack!** was a lot of things, most of them good; but it was not a gay film, nor was it the long-awaited marriage of pornography and art I was assured it was before the screening. These are minor criticisms of a well-made and genuinely funny film, but they are important distinctions. I love porn, and I have shelled out too many bucks for and been too disappointed by all those productions that claim to be both aesthetically and erotically satisfying to let yet another such claim slip by unchallenged.

The basis of the plot is the coming together—pun intended—of eight disparate and desperate people, driven by a raging Nebraska storm to seek shelter at "Prairie Acres," the decayed remnants of a Southern-style estate presided over by an alcoholic widow named Gert Hammond. Their confinement builds a sexual charge that, like the atmospheric electricity outside, is released whenever appropriate contact is made in a series of seemingly random couplings. The main differ-

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George Kuchor and Marion Eaton in **Thundercrack!**

ence is that this libidinous lightening strikes frequently in the same place.

Sexually, **Thundercrack!** tries to provide the proverbial something-for-everyone. Besides several straight pairings, there are solo turns by one woman and two of the men and two same-sex encounters, one male and one female. I suppose all this justifies some of the producers' claims of appealing to a gay audience, but just barely. By the end of the film, all the characters have realigned themselves into male/female couples, including one man who since his wife's death had been able to relate sexually only to men. His final relief at being "cured" negated any political value of the few homoerotic episodes.

But it is erotically and not politically that the film betrays its lack of a gay sensibility; the sex scenes in question may be clinically homosexual, but they are decidedly not gay. The biggest giveaway is the cinematic treatment of semen, which is exhibited here only as visual evidence of a real orgasm, the necessarily messy consequence of getting your rocks off, just as it is grudgingly shown in straight porno. Any appreciation of gay male sexuality would have made love's liquid artillery appear at least sensuous; a gay artist might even have made it beautiful. Instead, it, like the sex that preceeds it, comes off (again with the puns) as humorous, as when one stud's solo ends with him perfunctorily emptying an Accu-Jac onto the floor.

The humorous treatment of sex throughout the film—notice the hokey honky-tonk piano music as the bodies grind away—is what ultimately separates the erotic and artistic contents with a gap the director, Curt McDowell, is unable to bridge. It takes no artifice, much less art, to make sex funny; the act itself is bizarre enough, the physical reality too awkward (especially when the participants are contorting themselves to allow for maximum visibility) not to possess the incongruity that, untempered, results in humor. Not that comedy cannot be art; but pointing up the absurdity of sex, almost holding it up to ridicule, is the safe way out. While precluding a possible reaction of disgust from a prudish audience, such treatment does little to illuminate the mystique behind what has surely been humanity's greatest obsession throughout history.

Having decided what **Thundercrack!** is **not**, however, we can pass on to consider what it is—immensely funny and tightly scripted (by George Kuchar, who also appears in the film), no mean feat in the cinematic underground. Marion Eaton's incredible performance as Gert Hammond is the glory of the film, as her character is the focal point of the plot. Gert is a fabulous creation, borrowing heavily from numerous Tennessee Williams heroines, and Eaton sustains her derelict complexity flawlessly with a degree of control rarely surpassed by any film actress. I do not exaggerate; she is that good.

The men in the cast are adequate, but the rest of the women would look bad even without Eaton's dazzling contrast. They are what you would expect from any cheap fuckflick, rarely achieving even a Linda Lovelace competence. The camera angles are thoughtful and imaginative, but the print was at times overexposed, detracting from what little sensuous appeal had not been directed out of the sexual episodes. The absence of color didn't add anything to the film's eroticism, although it did enhance the '50s period feel.

I would recommend that everyone, regardless of sexual preference, see **Thundercrack!**, if for no other reason than Eaton's incredible portrayal. Gay this film ain't, and hardly erotic, but it happily provides a vehicle for what may be the most powerful characterization ever unearthed from the underground. •

# THIS WEEK

## AUG. 19/26

Edited by William Harris

★ Especially recommended

## Thursday, August 19

We forgot to mention it, but two days ago, the 6th Annual **Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors** performing arts festival began. The 3-week al fresco celebration utilizes the parks and plazas surrounding LC. All events are free and featured today is harpsichordist **Frances Cole**. (12:15pm)

What happens when a displaced Californian is matched with a half-hearted Yale law student? A torch-boogie group called **Stormin' Norman and Suzy**, whose performance is like a cross between Jelly Roll Morton and W.C. Fields. Well, sort of. (Tramps, 125 E. 15th St., 10pm & midnight, 260-0370)

The Glines is sponsoring a mini **Gay Film Festival** thru this weekend. Michael Wallin's *The Place Between Our Bodies*, previously shown at MOMA, deals with all aspects of gay sexuality. Hajime Kondo's *The Loft Boys* and Terry Hammond's *Prissy Grunt's Crypt* are also on the program. (260 W. B'way, 925-2619, $3, 9pm)

**Phil Donahue** is the new syndicated talk-show host who devotes each show to just one guest. He'll spar with **Muhammed Ali**, who will discuss his plans to become richer than Howard Hughes. (Channel 9, 7pm)

If you feel the New York Underground rockers have had too much exposure, then why not sample the Boston-bred variety, playing this weekend at CBGB's. A special regional treat are the **Dead Boys**, who hail from Cleveland. (315 Bowery, 982-4052)

Chinatown: A View From Within

## Friday, August 20

★ The legendary **Peter Schumann and the Bread and Puppet Theatre** are returning to NY to present **White Horse Butcher** and other short pieces. All of the work was seen earlier this month during the *Domestic Resurrection Circus and Pageant*, held outdoors in Vermont. (Washington Sq. Methodist Church, 133 E. 4th St., 7:30pm, $2.50, no reservations)

Three rarely performed one-acts by **Bertolt Brecht** have managed to get a production. **The Jewish Wife, The Informer,** and **In Search of Justice** are actually part of a longer play, *The Private Life of the Master Race*, which was Brecht's only play which directly dealt with the problem of Nazi Germany. (National Arts Theatre, 25 E. 4th St., $2.50, 8pm, 475-9102)

The Jamaica Arts Center has a Friday series of films on art and artists. Today's offering is **The Great Blondino** by Robert Nelson and William Wiley. Originally screened at the Whitney, it is playful and imaginative. (161-04 Jamaica Ave., 658-7400, 12:30pm, free)

**Chinatown: A View From Within** is the name of an exhibition of photographs by R.J. Chu, now on display at the Alfred Stieglitz Gallery. It's not all exotic. (34 W. 13th St., thru Aug. 29)

★ That curly-haired moppet, **Arlo Guthrie**, will bring his twangy tunes to the Schaefer Music Festival tonight. Bring pickles. (Wollman Skating Rink, 59th & Fifth Ave., 6pm)

Ailey's *The Mooche*

## Saturday, August 21

Last Saturday we recommended brunch at McKay's. It's actually called Ruskay's and is located at 323 Columbus Ave., 874-8391. Sorry about that. The food is still good, however.

Stand-up comedians are being given a new showplace, outdoors on Pier 15 of the South Street Seaport Museum. **Glen Super** and **Gary Yudman** are tonight's funnymen. If you don't like them, the river is convenient for their disposal. (7:30pm, 16 Fulton St., $2.50, 766-9042)

Tonight's is the next to last performance of **Alvin Ailey**'s dance company, in a program which features such signature pieces as *Blues Suite* and *The Mooche*, as well as the beautiful solo by Judith Jamison, *Cry*. (New York State Theatre, 8pm, 247-1641)

Polish absurdist playwright **Slawomir Mrozek** has always specialized in the macabre and the satirical. His play, **The Party**, is being presented by A Poor Man's Theatre, both this weekend and next. (35 W. 19th St., 924-2176, 8pm)

Squeal with delight over **Chuck Mangione** and **Esther Satterfield**, who will energize the Schaefer Music Festival. (Wollman Skating Rink, 59th & 5th Ave., 6:30pm)

## Sunday, August 22

This is the last day to catch **Miguel Pinero**'s new play, **The Guntower**, now being presented by the Nuyorican Playwrights and Actors Workshop at the Public Theatre: Two prison guards on a gun tower, in what Pinero describes as "a psychological study in insanity." (425 Lafayette St., $2.50, 8pm, 677-6350)

With a script by the man who wrote *The Summer of '42*, Bobby Gentry's greatest and only hit, **Ode to Billy Joe**, has reached the silver screen. Perhaps I shouldn't tell, but the reason Billy Joe jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge is from shame over a homosexual encounter, "the sin against nature and against God." The only honorable thing to do? (Neighborhood Theatres)

Originally exploited as a sex film upon its initial release in this country, **Ingmar Bergman**'s 1951 **Monika**, starring Harriet Andersson, is unsuited to the raincoat brigade. Playing in a double bill with *Through a Glass Darkly*. (Bleecker St. Cinema, 144 Bleecker St., 674-2560)

## Monday, August 23

★ **Project Rebuild** is an exhibition of paintings, sculpture and works on paper donated by leading American artists to aid the earthquake damaged North Italian region of Friuli. Among the 50 participating artists are Carl Andre (whose idea it was), Mark di Suvero, Don Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Brice Marden, and Saul Steinberg. The exhibition hangs for one more week before all works are shipped off to Italy. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Square East)

★ **The National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case** is holding two benefits at the Village Gate, to gain support in their campaign to have all governmental files on Ethel & Julius made public. **Rip Torn** will host **Vinnie Burrows, Danny Kalb & Irwin Corey.** Michael Meeropol, the elder Rosenberg son, will also be present. (Bleecker & Thompson Sts., 8:30pm, $5, for info. 265-0918)

Santana has cancelled their appearance at Schaefer Music Festival tonight and on Wednesday. This is called a big bummer, but should be soothed by the appearance of **Average White Band** (Wollman Skating Rink, 59th & 5th Ave., 6:30pm)

Once again the CBS late movie comes through with beddy-by cheer. **Keeper of the Flame** is the 1943 movie starring Spencer Tracy & Katherine Hepburn about a war correspondant who stumbles on the little-known fact that an honored American had collaborated with the Fascists. (1:30am)

Morgana King

## Tuesday, August 24

Although everyone knows **Leni Riefenstahl** as a film propagandist, few people remember her acting career. Two films, **White Hell of Pitz Palu** and **S.O.S. Iceberg** will refresh your memory. The latter film co-stars Rod LaRocque. (Theatre 80, 80 St. Mark's Place, 254-7400)

**Morgana King** requires a very special, acquired taste. With a tiny, heady voice she is quite unique on the cabaret circuit. Be adventurous. (Grand Finale, 210 W. 70th St., 9pm & midnight, 595-4206)

★ Perhaps appropriately, the Mostly Mozart Festival at Alice Tully Hall will begin its final week with the **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center**. The seven member ensemble will not only offer the traditional mixture of Beethoven and Mozart, but will also perform Schumann's *Marchenerzahlungen*. (8pm, 362-1911)

No one's sure what will happen, but **Thunderbyrd** will debut at the Bottom Line. If you haven't guessed, **Roger McGuinn** heads the group, which also includes Bruce Barlow, Lance Dickerson, James Q. Smith, and Byron Berline & Sundance. (15 W. 4th St., 228-7880)

## Wednesday, August 25

This is definitely a night to stay home and listen to old Beatles records, in memoriam for **Brian Epstein**, who died 9 years ago today. The one reason the Beatles will never get together again!

Then turn on the TV. **Frankie Avalon** and **Annette Funicello** (*Mad Magazine* once called her Funnyjello) are reunited in all their sexless bikini splendor in *Easy Does It*, a new variety series. The question is how can two existing parodies do a parody of themselves? (CBS 8pm)

If that doesn't appeal to you, switch over to Channel 9 to see **Mr. Roberts**, the classic war-time comedy starring Henry Fonda, Jack Lemmon and James Cagney. Alright, so you've already seen it. But did you know that Henry Fonda had John Ford, the original director, fired? Think about it.

Escape the ennui of NY August by going to the Nassau Coliseum. The **Jefferson Starship** is there for two fantastic nights.

Continued from page 17

Naziism is a warning for contemporary society also.

Screened Saturday, March 14, was *Army of Lovers*, an intriguing documentary of American gay people from a German filmmaker. Rosa von Praunheim, a gay man teaching film in this country, responded to Anita Bryant's 1977 crusades and the Briggs Initiative by creating this kaleidoscopic compendium of gay life in the United States. Represented were nearly all gay "types" imaginable: activists, conservatives, Third World gays, young gay people, separatist lesbians, gay men in drag costumes, "Castro Clones," older gays, and more. While Praunheim clearly expressed his personal viewpoint, it was generally a very fair and even-handed film statement.

For example, Praunheim voiced some contempt for "mainstream" activists like Jean O'Leary and Bruce Voeller of the National Gay Task Force. Praunheim felt they had sold out to the establishment, yet he provided the NGTF directors with the opportunity to tell their side of the story. In dealing with separatist lesbians, Praunheim made the disclaimer that, as a gay man, he could not fully understand their political position and left a more complete treatment of lesbian society to women filmmakers. At the same time, he gave separatist women the chance to present their views and did not fall into the trap of ignoring the women's community merely because he was not a part of it. Praunheim also covered such controversial elements of the gay community as boy-loving men, without leering, judging, or fostering their opinions.

*Army of Lovers* is relatively explicit in male-to-male sex; fellatio and the fondling of male genitals occur a number of times. Praunheim insists that sex itself is an intrinsic and basic facet of being gay; to omit the physical expression of sexuality from a "gay documentary" is to remain bound by the closet. While some might question this opinion, *Army of Lovers* stands as an open, honest statement for gay liberation.

This weekend, the Friday 7 p.m. showing is "Heartbreak and Poetry," featuring a *Portrait of May Sarton* and *Silverpoint*; at 9 p.m. several films by experimental lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer will be shown. Hammer's work is sometimes inscrutably personal but always thought-provoking.

On Saturday, March 21, gay male experiemental-sexual films will be shown; the self-explanatory *Robert Having His Nipple Pierced* features Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith; *The Deep Frontier* presents fisting; *Scorio Rising* by Kenneth Anger is a testament to S&M and biker sexuality. Also on the bill at 7 are *Fireworks* (also by Anger) and *Your Mother* by Pete Schrader. At 9 p.m. *Leather Boys*, an English film made in the 1960s, deals with "working-class London and the world of leather-clad motorcyclists."

## Men's films presented at festival

By Sean O'Connor

An overflow crowd viewed a diversified program during the first evening of films by and for gay men shown by the First Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival on March 7 at Chicago Filmmakers, 6 W. Hubbard St. It was a night of short works, most of which came from the West Coast, the notable exception being Jean Genet's *Un chant d'Amour*, which was produced in France in 1952.

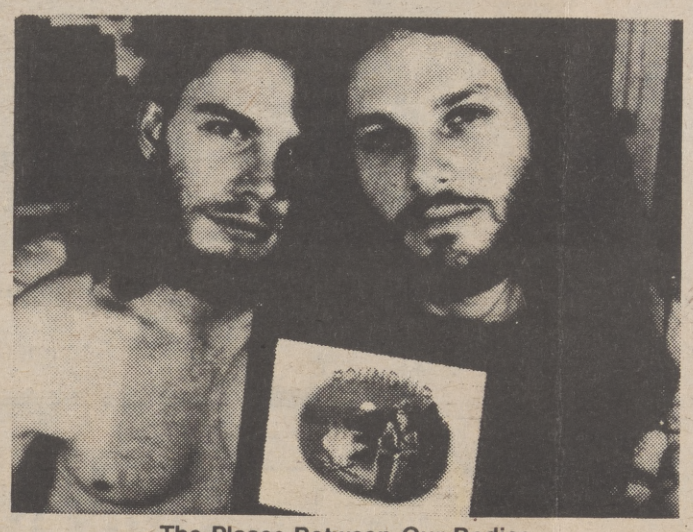
Made between 1946 and 1979, the West Coast films all dealt with gay male sexuality, many quite explicitly. Future programs at the festival, which continues on Fridays and Saturdays through March 28, will highlight other aspects of gay life through a variety of film styles.

The first week's men's films (Friday nights are devoted to films deemed of interest primarily to women; Saturdays are for men) were all cast in a traditional underground film mode. One of them at least—Curtin Harrington's *Fragment of Seeking* (1946)—is an underground classic.

Underground movies have been around since movies began and have traditionally dealt with taboo subjects, always in a highly personal, often in a voyeuristic way. Now that the commercial cinema has come of age and deals openly with such topics as homosexuality, the underground films have a tendency to seem quaint.

Quaintness notwithstanding, it is difficult to explain the strange reception accorded this screening by the audience.

*Fragment of Seeking*, for example, a formal, Freudian study of a young man poised between the allure of a woman and the mystery of another young man, was openly ridiculed. Shot in black and white at a West Coast villa, with Harrington playing his own hero, the film consists of static, painterly compositions in which its three characters appear and re-appear framed in windows and doorways or walking through hallways. The extremely young Harrington is first seen in a trenchcoat, hat, and glasses, looking overly serious and bearing a resemblance to Woody Allen.



The Places Between Our Bodies

This set the audience laughing and they never stopped. Harrington's intent, however, is clearly not comic, and the film is finely crafted. In an event that is supposed to celebrate gay expression, why this lack of sympathy for an attempt at personal expression?

Likewise, two films by James Broughton became the object of derisive humor and the occasion for unintended merriment. Broughton has been called by film critic Parker Tyler, in his book *Underground Film: A Critical History*, "one of the outstanding experimental filmmakers of the '40s." Today, Broughton makes films in collaboration with his young lover Joel Singer.

The first of their two films, *Song of the Godboy* (1978), features closeups of Broughton's body while his voice is heard reciting verses of poetry. The intense magnification of skin pores and hair follicles make the body look like some unearthly terrain. The other Broughton/Singer film, *Hermes Bird* (1979), is a single, uninterrupted profile shot of a penis, flaccid at first and rising during the film's 11 minutes to full erection. Seen as one of nature's greatest events, this erection is simultaneously matter-of-fact and magnificent, like a sunrise. This, too, is accompanied by Broughton's poetry reading.

The ideas in both of these films are shallow and the poetry droning, but to hear the audience's response one would have thought it was Mel Brooks night.

Received with more respect was

Continued to page 19

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Michael Wallin's 1975 film *The Place Between Our Bodies*, in which the filmmaker verbalizes his problems relating to masturbation fantasies, to the cruising scene, and to a new lover while showing home movie-like footage of these things. A long, totally explicit scene of love-making between himself and his lover is accompanied by an interview with the lover in which he goes on and on about being "obsessed with you at first," but learning to "hang loose" and "focus my energy."

One might have expected this litany of introspective cliches to elicit laughter, but it didn't. The visuals dominated. The main thing distinguishing this work from the porno films one might see at the Bijou or the Image is its celebratory intent.

The last item on the program was the rarely seen 1953 film *Un chant d'amour*, by French novelist and playwright Jean Genet. A complex and obsessive work, *Un chant d'amour*, begins and ends with two of Genet's most recurrent images, convicts and flowers. A prison guard observes from a courtyard a prisoner trying to pass a garland from his window to the window of the prisoner in the next cell. Each time the first man swings the garland, the second man grabs for it and misses. Everything else that happens in the film may or may not occur in the guard's imagination, triggered by this chance observation.

Genet's prison festers with male eroticism as the guard walks a corridor, spying on the inmates through peepholes in the cell doors. Several prisoners masturbate. One dances with himself, caressing the shoulder that bears a tattoo of a female figure. The man in the next cell shares a cigarette with the young dancer by blowing the smoke into his mouth through a straw that has been inserted through a tiny hole in the wall. He imagines himself and the dancer free together in fields and woods. The guard enters the cell of the man with the cigarette and forces him at gunpoint to perform fellatio on him. Through these unforgettable images, Genet finds a kind of love, not in spite of but because of the circumstances.

A second, separate film festival program featured the bizarre 1953 Hollywood pseudo-documentary *Glen or Glenda*. Narrated by Bela Lugosi, *Glen or Glenda* purports to explore the troubled world of the transvestite. Psychologically unsound and cinematically tacky, this film truly deserved the derision it met at its screening. It can be enjoyed as camp, although it is not as funny as, say, *Reefer Madness*, a similarly misguided attempt at socially meaningful cinema.

*Glen or Glenda*'s best moment occurs when Glen's fiancee, Barbara, in a bravura show of sympathetic understanding, takes off the angora sweater that he has long coveted and gives it to him. Although it is impossible to imagine what was in the minds of the filmmakers when they made *Glen or Glenda*, at least their hearts seem to be in the right place. The movie asks tolerance for those with deviant ways.

# DIVERSITY

GOLDEN GOOSE ENTERPRISES • FILM GROUP • 1952 - 15th ST. • SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94114


## Previews of the Erotic Eighties/Mar. 24

# 'OPEN WINDOWS' TO PLAY CASTRO

## Six Local Filmmakers Featured

As might be expected, the San Francisco film community is well represented in "Open Windows," a presentation of 12 erotic short films scheduled for midnight Saturday, March 24 at the Castro Theater. In fact, local filmmakers account for 8 of the of the 12 films and over 2/3 of the program's 150-minute running time.

Promoter Jim Hoffman, says "The work being shown March 24 is only a small percentage of the available, locally-produced 16mm films that "sexually sophisticated audiences would appreciate."

"This program presents the best short films consistent with the program's theme. In a sense, it is like a group show at an art gallery — a lot of individuals are represented, and there is a diversity of approaches and styles."

Hoffman added that he hopes local audiences will have opportunities in the future to see feature-length films by these and other artists who are currently active in the San Francisco area film community. "There's a lot of old work worth looking at, and the new stuff promises to be totally incredible," he said. " 'Open Windows' could be only a preview of film's 'Erotic Eighties.' "

*Tickets available at:* **Dear John,** 4109 18th Street, San Francisco and **Years Ahead,** 1250 Polk Street, San Francisco.

Three of the films in "Open Windows" were created by San Franciscan Curt McDowell, who is frank in acknowledging a strong streak of voyeurism in his life and work.

All three of McDowell's entries

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**by JIM HOFFMAN**

"Open Windows," a package of 12 short erotic films by underground film-makers, will appear at the Castro Theater in San Francisco at midnight, Saturday, March 24, for one night only.

The 2-1/2 hour presentation will feature work by a variety of artists, many of them local. The films reflect the turbulent developments in sexual consciousness that have occurred during the last decade — especially the gay liberation movement.

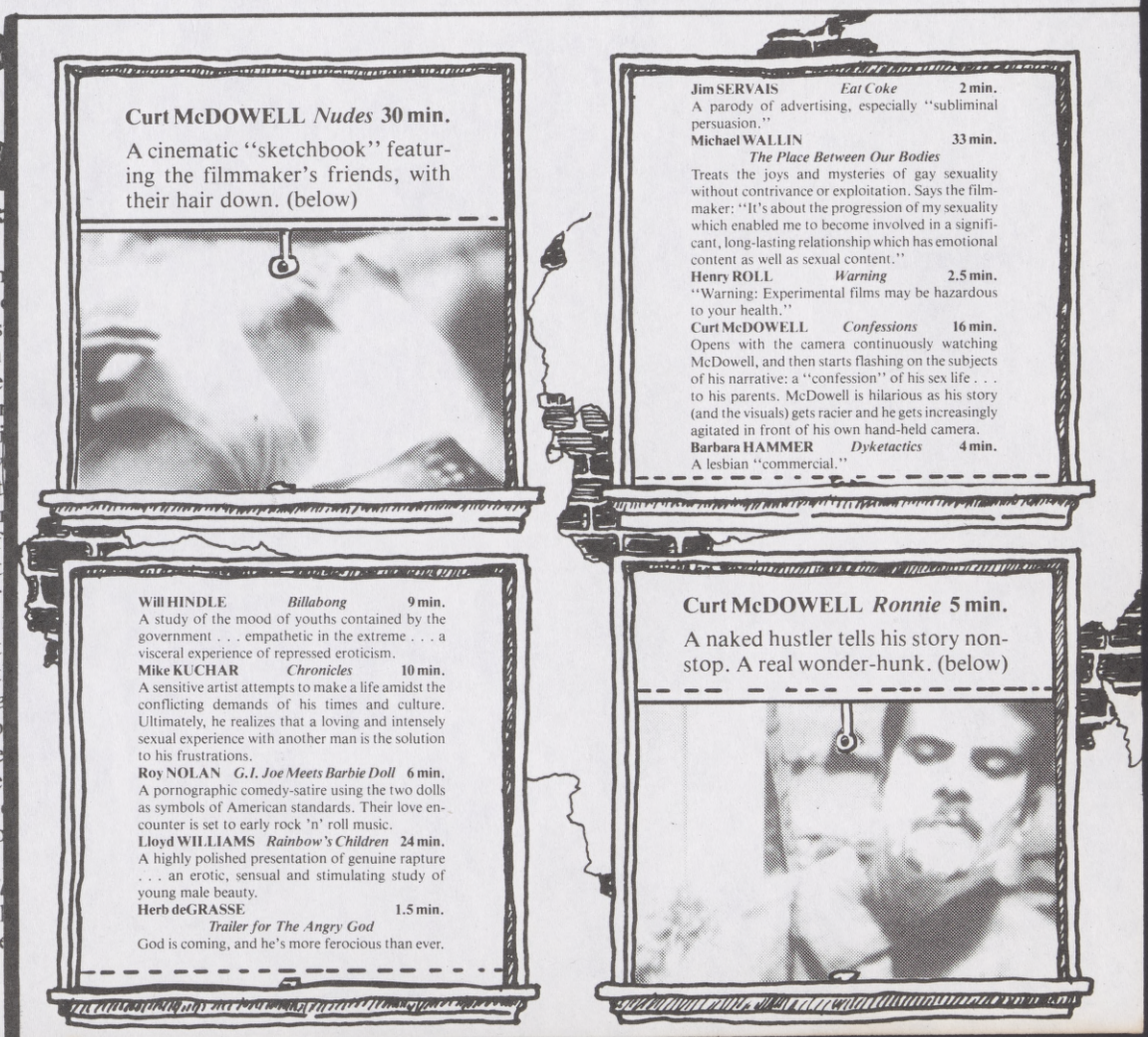
"This program is intended primarily to appeal to gay audiences," according to promoter Jim Hoffman. "There is a lot of explicit gay sex. What makes the films different from pornography — and more accessible to non-gay audiences — is their insight into the emotional, attitudinal, and sociopolitical aspects of the gay lifestyle . . . insights too often lacking in what is usually served up as "erotic" film for gay viewers."

From the totally honest Michael Wallin, to the totally outrageous (and shameless) Curt McDowell, to the polished, sophisticated visuals of Lloyd Williams, these films present the filmmakers' highly personal visions of their sexuality. There is an unusual feeling of reality, and a definite sense that what the filmmakers are presenting are not sexual ikons, but their own experience.

Adds filmmaker McDowell, "You could say that these are breakthrough films. They deal with stuff other people haven't wanted to deal with before."

"It is the kind of stuff most people — gay or not — haven't seen before," according to Hoffman. "And they're not likely to see it anywhere else."

**OPEN WINDOWS, at The Castro Theater, one night only, midnight Saturday, March 24, 1979. Separate admission required: $2.75.**
— ★★★½


Curt McDOWELL *Nudes* 30 min.
A cinematic "sketchbook" featuring the filmmaker's friends, with their hair down. (below)
Jim SERVAIS *Eat Coke* 2 min.
A parody of advertising, especially "subliminal persuasion."
Michael WALLIN 33 min.
*The Place Between Our Bodies*
Treats the joys and mysteries of gay sexuality without contrivance or exploitation. Says the filmmaker: "It's about the progression of my sexuality which enabled me to become involved in a significant, long-lasting relationship which has emotional content as well as sexual content."
Henry ROLL *Warning* 2.5 min.
"Warning: Experimental films may be hazardous to your health."
Curt McDOWELL *Confessions* 16 min.
Opens with the camera continuously watching McDowell, and then starts flashing on the subjects of his narrative: a "confession" of his sex life . . . to his parents. McDowell is hilarious as his story (and the visuals) gets racier and he gets increasingly agitated in front of his own hand-held camera.
Barbara HAMMER *Dyketactics* 4 min.
A lesbian "commercial."
Will HINDLE *Billabong* 9 min.
A study of the mood of youths contained by the government . . . empathetic in the extreme . . . a visceral experience of repressed eroticism.
Mike KUCHAR *Chronicles* 10 min.
A sensitive artist attempts to make a life amidst the conflicting demands of his times and culture. Ultimately, he realizes that a loving and intensely sexual experience with another man is the solution to his frustrations.
Roy NOLAN *G.I. Joe Meets Barbie Doll* 6 min.
A pornographic comedy-satire using the two dolls as symbols of American standards. Their love encounter is set to early rock 'n' roll music.
Lloyd WILLIAMS *Rainbow's Children* 24 min.
A highly polished presentation of genuine rapture . . . an erotic, sensual and stimulating study of young male beauty.
Herb deGRASSE 1.5 min.
*Trailer for The Angry God*
God is coming, and he's more ferocious than ever.
Curt McDOWELL *Ronnie* 5 min.
A naked hustler tells his story nonstop. A real wonder-hunk. (below)